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With more free time, delegates network, see the sights

by [Jessica Mador](#), Minnesota Public Radio
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After the Monday evening sessions of the Republican National Convention were canceled because of Hurricane Gustav, delegates suddenly found themselves with extra time on their hands.

Many delegates took the opportunity to check out the sights, party and network.

Fridley, Minn. — The RNC wrapped up on Monday after speeches from First Lady Laura Bush and Cindy McCain. By early evening, delegates started making their way back to their hotels and looking for something to do.

A few blocks from the Xcel Energy Center at the Saint Paul hotel, Laura French, an alternate with the Arizona delegation, was weighing her options.

"We are invited to this Convention Delegation from Arizona party at the BNSF railway," she said. "It's a little difficult to find so I'm going to try and venture out to that now."

French, who's in her 30's, works in marketing for the Arizona Travel and Tourism Board. She said most of Arizona's delegates took the news that the first night of the RNC would be canceled in stride.

"We had all seen the news about Gustav so we knew that something was going to happen, and as soon as we got here they let us know that we would just have the dropping of the gavel and do procedural things and everyone was fine with that because, obviously like all Americans, all of our hearts are going out to Gustav victims," she said.

The shortened schedule left French and thousands of other party delegates with a free night. Inside, the hotel lobby was packed with other delegates milling around the bar and figuring out how to spend the evening.

French decided against going to the Arizona delegation party after hearing the police were blocking access to the area because of street protests.

Instead, she boarded a free shuttle bus with the other delegates for a Medtronic-sponsored party in Fridley.

After a long day and a long bus ride, the hungry and thirsty delegates headed straight for the food and drink.

Near the food table, a group of women from another state's delegation were sporting flashy matching red sequin cowboy hats -- and soaking up the attention.

Janet Doran is with the Tennessee delegation.

"We decided, as a delegation of the Tennessee Federation of Republican Women, we wanted something that would set us apart from most and we came across these little hats, these sequin hats and ordered them and put our little campaign buttons on them and pins," Doran said.

But it wasn't just for show. Doran said she and five other women in her group are planning to wear their hats every day at the RNC. She said it's a way to call attention to the contribution of Republican women to politics and society.

But most of the crowd was more subdued. Men and women in business suits stood around mingling and listening to speeches by Medtronic executives.

The staid crowd wasn't exactly what French was hoping for her first night out on the town.

"I don't know what the breakup of delegates is but I think that's the crowd they are," she said.

"But I think there are other diverse events tomorrow. There is an Indian American lunch I'm going to and I'm hoping to go to Daddy Yankee tonight for a young Hispanic crowd, definitely."

Daddy Yankee is a popular Puerto Rican musician who recently endorsed Republican presidential nominee-to-be Sen. John McCain. His show Monday night in Maplewood was meant to highlight McCain's immigration and trade policies.

French said she thinks Daddy Yankee's endorsement will also attract more young people to the ticket.

"McCain goes across the board, he's a maverick and he always has been. That is who he is. He cuts across a lot of boundaries," she said.

As the speeches wore on, French made her way out of the party and found a taxi, determined to make the most of what was left of the night.

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